



It all began when Alex Kleider, a local Linux enthusiast, showed up at a OLPC San Francisco Bay Area meeting. His interest was in the OLPC XO-1 and Linux. Meanwhile, June Kleider (his wife), who had been to Madagascar a couple of times, had two XOs to give away - her grandchildren had outgrown these. She was familiar with the living conditions and education resources in small towns and villages in Madagascar. As Alex and June two talked, a plan emerged. June wanted to take these laptops to Maroantsetra, a small town on the eastern coast of Madagascar. To add to this family fascination, Isabella, June and Alex's grand daughter was going to be the adventurer! Together with June, Isabella got trained for the mission - deliver and deploy 15 OLPC XO laptops in Maroantsetra. After several meetings and discussions, a rudimentary plan emerged. What follows are Isabella's encounters during her fascinating trip.

Isabella and June took 15 OLPC XO laptops to Maroantsetra in September 2009, in what would amount to an Indiana Jones style adventure, but that story some other day. Once they got there, they gathered the local officials and improvised a deployment plan. They put the laptops to use in two different stages. From mid-September to mid-October, Isabella, with help from Pascal, a native, was able to take these laptops to secondary schools for two to three hours every day. Students poured in from all over. At one point, they had to enforce a token system to limit use so that everyone got a chance at playing on the laptop! They liked to use the video activity and paint to create local sceneries. The main reason for going to secondary schools was that the students were somewhat familiar with English. Working the circuit was tough - Isabella had to lug laptops in her backpack for 2 km every day.

"They live in an area where no one has computers. The laptops are extremely valuable."

"The children are very happy to use XOs. Nobody comes to help them, so it makes them feel special."

--Isabella

After the Christmas break, they switched over to primary schools. This was more rewarding because the children learned faster. Younger children enjoyed activities such as Maze, Memorize, and the music activity TamTamJam. They also liked to use the Record activity to record Isabella as she spoke in English. Later, they would listen to her recording and learn how to speak. Very innovative! Pascal continues to lug the laptops from one school to the next, and the children of Maroantsetra benefit, despite a lack of reliable electircal grid and Internet access. Its a good start and the Kleiders plan for a larger, more organized deployment later in 2010. We hope that Alex's love for Linux, June's go-getter attitude and Isabella's love for Madagascar will help Maroantsetrans get a leg up on the competition worldwide.

